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GRINGAS AND OTAVALEÑOS
Changing Tourist Relations

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Abstract: This article examines the romantic and sexual relations between young foreign women (gringas) and indigenous men (Otavaleños) in Otavalo, Ecuador. It argues that gringa-Otavaleño relationships represent neither First World dominance over Third or Fourth World people, nor tourism as an expression of patriarchy, but mutual fascination with, romantic misconceptions of, and sometimes economic exploitation of the other gender. The gringas are looking for noble savages and a pre-industrial utopia, while the Otavaleños want sex with a blonde, and sometimes financial support, especially when traveling. The article also raises the issue of the spread of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases due to these encounters. **Keywords:** Otavalo, Ecuador, gender relations, gringas, indigenous males, noble savage, romantic misconceptions, AIDS.

Résumé: Cet article examine les relations romantiques et sexuelles entre jeunes étrangères (Ricaines) et hommes indigénes à Otavalo, Équateur. On soutient que les relations entre Ricaines et autochtones ne représentent ni la prédominance des pays industrialisés sur les gens du tiers ou du quart monde, ni le tourisme comme expression du patriarcat, mais une fascination mutuelle, des idées fausses et parfois l'exploitation économique entre hommes et femmes. Les Ricaines cherchent des bons sauvages et une utopie pré-industrielle, tandis que les hommes d'Otavalo veulent des rapports sexuels avec une blonde, et quelquefois une aide financière, surtout en voyageant. L'article fait mention de la propagation du SIDA et d'autres maladies sexuellement transmissibles qui sont attribuables à ces rencontres. **Mots-clés:** Otavalo, Équateur, relations entre hommes et femmes, Ricaines, hommes indigénes, bon sauvage, idèes romantiques fausses, SIDA.

INTRODUCTION

Otavalo, Ecuador is the site of one of the most famous tourism destinations in South America. The fertile Otavalo valley, located 65 miles north of Quito at 9,203 feet above sea level in the province of Imbabura, is home to approximately 60,000 Otavalo indígenas (the preferred self-referential term for indigenous people), who live in the town of Otavalo and in 75 small, surrounding communities. Indígenas are predominantly weavers and merchants, whose marketing acumen has fueled an economic boom in the region, although some non-indígenas are also involved in artesanías (crafts) manufacture and sales. The Otavalos have long been of interest to researchers because of the group's ability to combine entrepreneurial skills and participation in the money economy with preservation of their culture and ethnic identity, which is marked by a distinct costume for both males

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and females (Collier and Buitrón 1949; Meisch 1987; Parsons 1945; Salomon 1981; Kandell 1993).

Tourists from around the world, especially from the United States, Canada, Europe, Colombia, and Peru, flock to Otavalo for the Saturday fair (Figure 1). During the high season (June, July, and August), as many as 2,000 North Americans and Europeans attend the Saturday market each week, along with equally large numbers of Colombians and Ecuadorians from outside Imbabura. Most visitors come for the weekend and leave, their interaction with local mestizos-whites and indígenas friendly, but minimal and short term. Others, usually young foreign women, engage in one or two night stands with young indigenous men, or stay and have longer relationships. These are sometimes based on mutual misunderstandings (or downright dishonesty) and false romantic notions about the other person. The young women are often looking for romance, an authentic experience or connection to

Figure 1. Otavalos and Foreigners at the Otavalo Saturday Market

indigenous culture, and sometimes a husband, while the young men are looking for sex and occasionally for someone to exploit financially, especially when they are traveling abroad. In other cases, however, both the men and women seem to be interested in merely a brief sexual encounter and both part amicably after a short time.

The ethnic group as a whole is called Otavalos in this article. Otavaleños means male Otavalo indígenas and Otavaleñas, its Spanish equivalent, means female Otavalo indígenas. This article examines gender relations between young, foreign women visitors to Otavalo (gringas) and Otavaleños. It challenges several assumptions about tourism from the First to the Third or Fourth Worlds or from wealthier to poorer countries. This is not to say that the assumptions are incorrect or invalid in all circumstances, only that the world tourism situation is changing rapidly, and that Otavalo and several other destinations suggest needed revision of theories and assumptions about tourism.

TOURISM AND POWER RELATIONS

The first assumption is that power relations are invariably weighted on the side of foreign or First World tourists. This view has been expressed by van den Berghe, among others, who asserts that "tourist-native interaction is between haves and have-nots with all the inequalities of wealth, status, and power that these asymmetrical relationships imply" (1992:235). The second assumption is that tourism is primarily a manifestation of patriarchy (Enloe 1989), which involves the exploitation of local women by visiting men, a situation that unfortunately holds in many places (see Leheny in this volume). Swain (1993) also argues for a re-evaluation of Enloe's thesis through careful consideration of local gender norms in small-scale indigenous communities that are involved in crafts production and the global tourism economy.

The third assumption is that tourism is a one-way street, that the visited are never visitors themselves. According to Rossel, "it has become quite normal for privileged people to spend their holidays in areas inhabited by those who themselves do not have the means to travel" (1988:2), yet Otavalo males and females, many only a generation away from *wasipungo* (debt serfdom), are traveling abroad by the thousands throughout South, Central, and North America, Europe, and Asia to play Andean music, to sell their textiles, to study, or simply to travel for pleasure. For many young, foreign women visitors to Otavalo their first encounter with Otavaleños is not in Ecuador but in Warsaw, Poland; Madrid, Spain; Cleveland, USA; or Montreal, Canada. Gender relations between visitors and visited in Otavalo must be analyzed within the context of increased Otavaleño wealth and travel abroad, as well as within the more usual context of foreign travel to Otavalo.

Tourism—a voluntary, temporary journey away from home for the purposes of recreation, renewal or experiencing a change (following Smith 1989:1)—may be distinguished from a journey away from home for reasons other than recreation, including (but not limited to) business trips, study, or religious pilgrimages. The distinction is important

for Otavalo because hundreds of exporters of Otavalo artesanías from Europe, Asia, and North America visit the region every year. Some exporters combine business with tourism, but most arrive in the region to buy; their purpose is business, although a few become romantically and sexually involved with Otavaleños. In addition, a number of undergraduate and graduate students visit Otavalo as part of a junior year abroad, international exchange program, or to conduct research. Some, especially undergraduate women, also become involved with Otavaleños.

The term *gringo* (or its feminine form, gringa) is not an insult in Ecuador. In its most general sense, it means foreigner, Gringo also refers to a non-Northern Andean foreigner, especially a light-haired, light-skinned person. Ecuadorians speak of a gringo from Argentina or a gringa from Japan, but Peruvians, Colombians, and Bolivians are never called gringos, unless they resemble Europeans. Ecuadorians usually use gringa to denote European and North American females.

Most Ecuadorians are dark-haired and dark-eyed, with skin color ranging from light to dark tan; there are many indígenas who are lighter in all respects than people who identify themselves as mestizos-whites. The government has promoted a policy of *mestizaje* (assimilation) of its indigenous population (approximately 30% to 40% of Ecuador's 11 million people), proclaiming that everyone is mestizo (Stutzman 1981). Some Ecuadorians call themselves *blancos* (whites), while others in the same family may call themselves *mestizos* (mixed blood), especially younger family members who were indoctrinated with *mestizaje* in school. The compound term mestizo-white is used in this article to indicate the dominant, non-indigenous population (with the exception of African- and Asian-Ecuadorians); it is also used in Ecuador in this sense.

Ethnic identity in Ecuador is a social and cultural, rather than racial, definition. In the Andean highlands, indígenas are identified by such criteria as dress, language, and residence, but especially by dress. Therefore, ethnicity is malleable and people take advantage of this fact to change their ethnic identity. The situation is quite fluid: one group of Americans met a young man at a *peña* (folk music club) in Otavalo. They thought he was a mestizo-white who had grown his curly hair long to attract gringas; in fact, he was an Otavaleño from Peguche wearing the latest New York fashions.

Costume (i.e., hairstyle, jewelry, and clothing) is the ultimate visual defining characteristic of indígenas. Since the 1940s until around 1990, the traditional dress of male Otavalo indígenas has consisted of white pants, a white shirt, white sandals, a navy blue poncho (sometimes double-faced with green or a tan or gray plaid on the opposite side), a tan, gray, brown, or black felt hat, and long hair, usually in a thick, shiny braid (Figure 2). Visitors often remark, "don't you just love their hair!" The above costume is worn for special occasions by virtually all males and is still seen daily on most males older than 40. Men between 30 and 40 usually substitute a jacket for the poncho for *quotidian* use, while most males in their 20s and younger wear baggy jeans, T-shirts or sweatshirts, jackets, and running shoes. Some of the younger males wear their hair in a pony tail rather than a braid, a fad started by an

Figure 2. Otavaleños Dancing in Peguche. (Don't You Just Love Their Hair?)

Otavalo music group, Charijayac, in 1987. Today the visual difference between young indígenous males and mestizos-whites in Otavalo has been reduced to hair and sometimes the hat; long hair worn in a braid or pony tail is the *sine qua non* of male indigenous identity. Otavalo females are more conservative in their dress, wearing a costume that is close in form to Inca women's dress.

The use of a distinct costume to convey political and social messages has a venerable history in the Andes. Costume was used to mark ethnic affiliation for centuries before the Inca expansion, but the Incas mandated that the groups they conquered preserve their costume, especially their headdress and hairstyle (Cobo 1979:190), and this custom of Andean ethnic groups distinguishing themselves by costume continues.

The Otavalos are able to successfully handle a massive influx of visitors and to participate in large-scale manufacturing and sales of woven goods. The tradition of this activity extends back to at least the 15th century. Salomon (1981, 1986) has documented the existence of a group of traders from the northern chiefdoms called *mindalaes*, who traveled throughout what is now northern Ecuador and southern Colombia, specializing in high-prestige goods. In the late 15th century, the Otavalo region polities fiercely resisted the Inca invasion from Peru, but were conquered by them and forced to pay tribute in textiles, among other items.

The Incas had scarcely been in the region 50 years when the Spanish arrived. The Spanish introduced the technology for the rapid production of cloth: hand carders, the spinning wheel, and the treadle loom. They also imported sheep, whose wool soon supplanted cotton as the main local fiber. The Spanish brutally exploited local textile skills,

establishing *obrajes* (sweatshops) in the region by the mid-1550s. Indígenas were often chained to the looms and compelled to work 13–14 hour days (Phelan 1967:71). Forced labor in the *obrajes* and on encomiendas eventually evolved into a system of *wasipungo* (debt peonage) on local haciendas that lasted until the Law of Agrarian Reform was passed in 1964, under pressure from the United States.

By the time wasipungo was abolished in 1964, Otavalo resembled a tightly wound spring with the populations' mass production know-how and marketing ability ready to uncoil with tremendous energy. Instead of weaving hundreds of ponchos, shawls, or blankets each month for the *patrón* (hacienda owner), families could weave and market for themselves and they did, using accumulated cash to invest in better looms, buy back land in the valley, build better homes, buy consumer goods, (including cars and trucks), educate their children, and open stores in Otavalo and Quito, and other Ecuadorian cities and towns.

Tourism and Travel In and Out

In the early 1960s, no more than a few foreigners attended the Otavalo weekly market, the textile portion of which was held in an open dirt field. In 1973, the Dutch government sponsored a development project to pave the Poncho Plaza and to construct umbrella-like concrete kiosks for the vendors (Figure 3). Attendance by foreigners at a high season (June, July, August) Saturday market rose into the hundreds from the mid-1970s through the mid-1980s, and into the thousands in the early 1990s. The number of retail artesanías stores in Otavalo went from one in 1966 to 75 in 1978, almost all of them indigenous-owned and operated, to perhaps the saturation point of 140 in 1994 (although some of these are primarily weaving workshops or

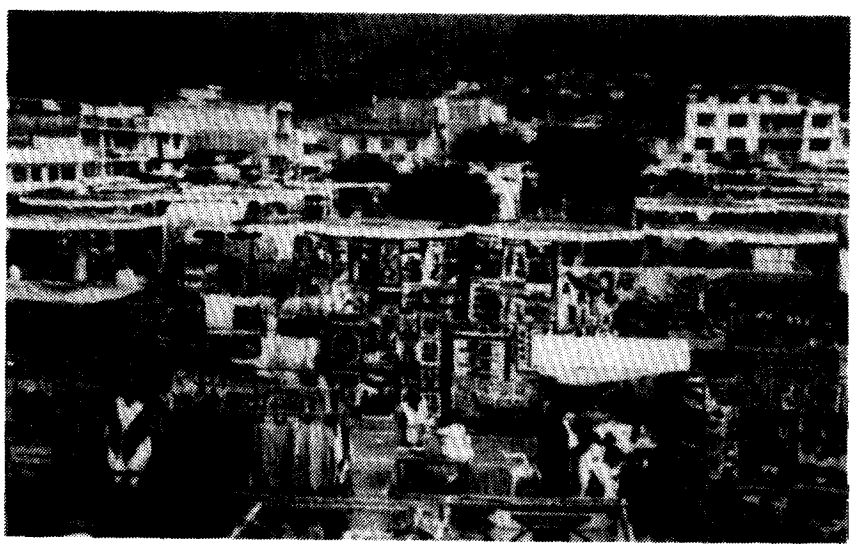

Figure 3. The Poncho Plaza on Saturday

store rooms). Along with the increase in tourism came an increase in exporters from abroad, who buy *artesanías* on a scale ranging from small (50 sweaters and 50 tapestries annually) to enormous (annual expenditures of US$250,000). Because of their nearly five-century history of production weaving, it is traditional for the Otavalos to switch gears and make what the market demands: thousands of ponchos for Bolívar's army in the 1820s; imitation British tweeds in the 1900s; or tapestry wall hangings with op art M. C. Escher motifs in the 1980s. Moreover, just because the Otavalos make something does not mean that they feel compelled to use it or wear it themselves; production of goods for outsiders does not automatically mean changes in cloth for traditional use.

Otavalo is not unique in Latin America in managing to control and benefit from tourism and the sales of *artesanías* to outsiders: Isla Taquile, Peru (Healy and Zorn 1983), and nearby Isla Amantaní, and Teotitlán del Valle, Mexico (Stephen 1991, 1991b) are other examples, although none of these communities approach Otavalo in the quantity of visitors or of goods sold.

In the 1970s and 1980s, indígenas opened a tourist agency, restaurants, *peñas folkloricas* (folk music clubs), hotels, a busline, and other businesses in Otavalo, and began buying or renting property in the town until the northern half of Otavalo became predominantly indigenous. The ethnic division of labor, which van den Berghe (1994) documents so well for San Cristóbal, Chiapas, with indígenas at the bottom receiving a minuscule portion of the income generated from tourism, simply does not pertain to Otavalo.

There are now definite class divisions within the Otavalo ethnic group, from the extreme wealth of some merchant and weaving families to the extreme poverty of those who remain primarily farmers. But the vast majority of Otavalos consider themselves solidly middle-class by Ecuadorian standards, as evidenced by their income and purchasing power. For example, in 1994, the legal monthly minimum wage, including various benefits, for factory workers, day laborers in agriculture, construction, etc., was 210,667 sucres per month (US$100). Women working as household domestics earn half that. At the same time, the government estimated that a family needed 618,000 sucres ($294) per month to survive (Hoy 1994). Artesanías can be a lucrative business. For example, in Otavalo a sweater wholesaler can make a minimum profit of $1.00 per sweater, and indigenous families are selling anywhere from 5,000 to 100,000 sweaters annually. This is, in a country where the average annual per capita income has hovered around $1,000 since the end of the 1980s, according to World Bank statistics.

Some of the possibly disruptive effects of tourism are mitigated by the location of the market in Otavalo, which was initially a mestizo-white enclave. The market provides a neutral meeting ground for the cultures: both indígenas and visitors meet in the market, then depart. Very few tourists, even today, visit any of the indigenous communities, many of which post flyers and posters in Otavalo welcoming visitors to their weaving workshops *cum* stores. An Otavalo merchant (male or female) can have brief contact with several hundred foreigners on a

Saturday, then return home (usually with a thick roll of bills) to live his or her life in the relative privacy afforded by any small town. This may be contrasted with Chiapas, as well as with Tana Toraja, Indonesia, where tourists come to watch funeral ceremonies and the Toraja gain little, if anything from their presence, and lose much, in terms of the invasion of privacy and disruption of their rituals, the theft of their statues, and the economic cost to feed the visitors as traditional hospitality requires (Crystal 1989).

Gringas and Otavaleños: The Beginning

In 1978, when the author first lived for an extended period of time in Otavalo, there was one hippie gringa who had an affair and a child with an Otavaleño. This situation was so unusual (in fact, unique within recent memory) that it engendered considerable negative comment among indígenas and mestizos-whites. By 1985, it was fairly common to see a gringa and an Otavaleño walking hand-in-hand down the street, or gringas and Otavaleños leaving the *peñas*, restaurants, and bars together late at night.

One reason for the recent plethora of gringa-Otavaleño affairs has to do with the abolition of *wasipungo* and the increase in indigenous wealth, which has resulted in better education, nutrition, and medical and dental care. The ideal mate or boyfriend for a Euro-American woman is generally taller, wealthier, and better educated than she is. The indígenas born as *wasipungeros* were usually short, many under 4½ feet tall, illiterate, missing teeth, and Quichua monolinguals. Some were humble to the extent of kneeling and kissing the hand of a mestizo-white person; indeed some still do so, which is highly disconcerting to those who want relationships on an equal level.

The generation born after 1964, and which came of age in the mid-1980s, is often 6 inches to more than a foot taller than their parents and grandparents. Eggs that were formerly given to the *patrón* or compadres are eaten at home. Families have the land or the money to raise or buy chickens, eggs, cattle for beef, milk and cheese, pigs, etc., not to mention all kinds of fruits and vegetables and iodized salt, which were formerly unavailable. The 1970s coincided not only with the beginning of an economic boom in Otavalo, but with Ecuador's emergence as an OPEC nation. Oil money meant such infrastructural improvements as roads, schools, rural electrification, potable water (somewhat erratically distributed), and health centers that provide basic care, including vaccinations for babies. The result is a generation that is, on the whole, healthier, taller, better educated, wealthier, more traveled, more sophisticated, more self-confident, and considerably less obsequious than their elders. In short, they meet Euro-American standards of sexual attractiveness. Moreover, the Otavaleños' travel abroad is associated in Euro-American culture with high status, and the fact that a young man has been in 10 different European countries and speaks German or French adds to his appeal. By 1985 and 1986, when the generation born after the abolition of *wasipungo* came of age, the number of gringa-Otavaleño sexual liaisons increased considerably. One woman from the United States explained the Otavaleños'

attraction: "These guys are so sexy! Long hair, high cheekbones, white teeth, well-built, nicely dressed, friendly . . . Sometimes I just like to sit and look at them. They're Madison Avenue Andean Indians."

Otavaleños have always traveled throughout Ecuador and Colombia marketing their cloth, and there has been an expatriate Otavalo weaving community in Barcelona, Spain, for a number of years. Beginning in the 1980s, Otavalos began traveling abroad to the United States, Canada, and Europe, on a very small scale at first. Some received invitations from North American anthropologists and linguists they had worked with, which helped them obtain tourist visas. Their American hosts suggested that their visitors bring textiles to sell informally. Other Otavaleños received invitations to demonstrate backstrap loom weaving or tapestry weaving, while a few others received business visas to the United States. Otavalos soon learned that they could easily pay for their trip and return to Ecuador with consumer goods and cash if they sold *artesanías* when they were in the United States. The fact that Otavalos and other indígenas received visas to the States when mestizos-whites were turned down was the cause of envy and ill will, but many Otavalos meet the technical requirements (land ownership, bank account, house title, store ownership or rental, and similar proofs of financial status) that suggest to the embassy that the person has economic resources and roots in Ecuador and is unlikely to stay illegally in the United States.

Europe, although father away and more expensive, has either no visa requirements or easier ones for Ecuadorians. Through 1993, an Ecuadorian with a return ticket and valid passport could stay up to 90 days in most western European countries, although France, Spain, and the United Kingdom required visas. If one wanted to bother with the legal niceties, he could go from country to country spending 90 days in each. Since 1994 some countries, such as the Netherlands, are asking to see proof of financial status, which is currently possession of US$1,000 at the port of entry. Otavalos without funds (one man arrived as a tourist with US$30.00) are put on the next flight home.

The music boom began in the mid-1980s. In 1986, an Otavalo group in Europe, Charijayac, recorded an extremely successful cassette and CD. In the summer of 1987, they made a triumphal return to Otavalo for a series of concerts. Besides starting the fad for unbraided hair, Charijayac served notice that Andean music was appreciated and lucrative in Europe. Otavalos who went to Europe to sell merchandise realized that they could also earn money playing music on the street and they did not have to haul huge bundles of textiles around.

What had been a trickle of musicians abroad became a flood by 1992. Traditionally, musicians are male, except for occasional female vocalists. A typical traveling group includes six to eight young male members (generally aged 16–28), playing such instruments as the flute, quena, panpipes, drum, violin, mandolin, charango, and rattles (Figure 4). Some traditional instruments, such as the Andean harp, are rarely played around Otavalo any more, and are too big to travel with in any event.

Travel agencies in Quito and Otavalo recognized that the Otavalos were good risks and began advancing tickets on credit with an average

Figure 4. Otavalo Musicians Playing at the Hotel Ali Shungu in Otavalo. This Group Spends The Summer in Europe

interest of 30%, the total payable within a year at the maximum (terms vary among the agencies). Other Otavalos put their tickets on their credit cards, others pay cash for half and owe the other half of their ticket interest free. Families often put up their vehicles, looms, houses, or land as collateral for these loans. A young man can learn an instrument, join or form a group, practice all winter, and take off for Europe in May with a change of clothes and a musical instrument. By the summer of 1994, there were 60 to 100 Otavalo bands playing in Europe, and an equal number in the United States and Canada. Because of the easy credit for Otavalos, the young men who are traveling abroad, and who are becoming sexually and romantically involved with gringas, come from all social classes. This is not a phenomenon of either outcasts or elites; the young men are typical Otavaleños.

Blonde Babes and Noble Savages

Otavaleños traveling abroad soon learned that they were attractive to Euro-American women. Several Otavaleños said in amazement when they returned to Otavalo, "They take us home right off the street!" The Euro-American women have been the aggressors or the initiators of the affairs, as they often are in Otavalo. Most of the young men traveling abroad for the first time have had minimal experience with gringas and are basically shy and reserved. Part of their initial attraction is that they are unaware of how attractive they are, although that changes quickly with all the attention from Euro-American women. The Otavaleños also realized that living with a local woman made life abroad "much more comfortable," as one of them put it. A *carpe diem* philosophy seems to be at work. If women are willing to

provide room, board, romance, sex, and help navigating European or North American culture, why not? Recently several Otavalo parents have said they will not help their sons travel abroad, especially if they want to go as musicians, because the young men learn *malas costumbres* (bad habits) and become *mujeriegos* (womanizers).

Powerful romantic conceptions and misconceptions are operating on both sides of the cultural and gender divide. Gringas, particularly blondes, are considered exotic in Ecuador. The afternoon Ecuadorian tabloids, and calendars given out each year by commercial establishments, invariably contain photos of at least one bare-breasted woman, usually blonde. Advertisements, television, beauty contests, and books all contain far more blondes than their presence in the population would warrant. One young blonde American woman in Otavalo who was researching her senior honors thesis, felt flattered by all the admiration she received and admitted, "I don't get this much attention at home." Moreover, the Ecuadorian ideal body type is more womanly than the impossibly-slim American ideal, so that young women who consider themselves too fat or otherwise unattractive suddenly discover that they are considered beauties, and the experience is heady. Indigenas and gringas share a mutual fascination with one another (Figure 5). Indígenas, incidentally, do not wish to be white themselves nor do they particularly value white skin; gringas of whatever coloring, but especially blondes, are simply unusual and exotic. The general reputation that gringas have for being sexually loose allows a young man to hope that something might transpire.

In their visions of Otavaleños (and other indigenous people), the gringas' romanticism is basically the latest version of the noble savage trope (trope meaning "images and ideas, both visual and verbal modes of expression" [Torgovnick 1990:252]). As Trouillot has pointed out,

Figure 5. Mutual Fascination

"for Rousseau, as for More and Defoe, the savage is an argument for a particular kind of utopia." He also observed that "one suspects that the savage as wise is more often than not Asiatic, the savage as noble is often a Native American and the savage as barbarian is often African or African-American" (1991:27, 43). Many Europeans and Americans are imbued with a profound nostalgia for a world believed lost, but found in Otavalo: prosperous settlements in a pristine setting where traditional customs, community, and family appear to be intact. One American exporter called Otavalo "paradise." As MacCannell writes, "For moderns, reality and authority are thought to be elsewhere in other historical periods and other cultures, in purer, simpler lifestyles" (1976:3). When the fissures appear in this unrealistic picture, foreigners often react with dismay or outrage.

MacCannell's writing on tourism, particularly his chapter on "Staged Authenticity," which draws on Goffman's (1959) discussion of front and back regions, offers a related reason why affairs with Otavaleños are appealing to gringas. MacCannell observes that, "The front is the meeting place of hosts and guests or customers and service persons, and the back is the place where members of the home team retire between performances to relax and prepare." He goes on to note that "Tourists like to visit the back region, . . . " (1976:92, 98). What could be more backstage, and offer a more intimate experience of a culture, than being invited into someone's bedroom and bed? Unfortunately this behavior often backfires, for reasons stated later.

The image of the timeless, noble savage is fostered by most guidebooks and by the tourism literature produced abroad and locally, as well as by the New Age fascination with shamanism and the ecology movement's apotheosis of indigenous people as "natural ecologists." Silver (1993) calls the tourism industry's strategy "marketing authenticity." For example, an ad for Overseas Adventure Travel reads: "Exotic lands! Overseas Adventure Travel has 15 years experience taking travelers to remote destinations. From Borneo to Bolivia, Tanzania to Turkey, Ecuador to Egypt, Peru to Pakistan . . . " (*Mother Jones* 1992: 68). Exotic, according to the *Oxford American Dictionary*, means "striking and attractive for being colorful and unusual" and is a travel shorthand for "exciting, romantic, different, primitive, remote, wondrous, and strange." Exotic lands by definition are not inhabited by modern or postmodern citizens, but by savages, noble or otherwise.

American Express offers a 10-day "Highlands of Ecuador" vacation package. The brochure says, "As we travel throughout this country of magnificent landscaped valleys, small Indian villages, colorful Indian markets, and Spanish colonial cities, you'll see the past and present unfold before you" (1991:26). Of significance is the use of the term *villages* with its connotation of a pre-industrial pastoral existence, as well as the implication of timelessness as "the past and present unfold before you." All the travel agencies in Otavalo, including the indígena-owned one, offer tours of the "Indian villages." Not communities or towns, but villages.

Two more examples, among dozens, will suffice. *The Philadelphia Inquirer's* travel section contained an article on Otavalo with the headline "Under the spell of Otavalo." According to the text, "the Ecuador-

ian village nestled in the Andes is known for its impressive weekend market. But better than the haggling is the nighttime, when the Otavalenos [sic] bring out their mandolins to accompany the dances of their Inca heritage" (Enda 1993:R-1). Of several factual errors in this article, the most egregious is the imputed Inca ancestry of the Otavalos, who occupied the region long before the Incas arrived from Peru. The other error, a deliberate anachronism, is the "dances of their Inca heritage," an unusual classification of disco, cumbia, salsa and hip hop to say the least. What the headline implies is timelessness and performance: indígenas presenting dances unchanged in 500 years before an audience of enthralled foreigners, rather than a modern music club.

Finally, an admonition from *The Actual Travel Guide: Otavalo*. The anonymous author writes: "Please ask everyone you try to photograph, for permission. Because here a lot of Indians believe that they will lose their soul when you take a picture of them" (Anonymous 1993–94:22). The phrase that immediately comes to mind is "primitive superstitions!" The travel writer is correct that people should ask permission to photograph, but the reason is not beliefs about soul loss, but common courtesy. Some visitors shove their cameras in indigenas' faces and take pictures without so much as a smile, greeting, or request for permission. Worse, some visitors touch indigenas and rearrange their pose or their clothing, treating them as objects rather than as human beings.

This author has conducted numerous interviews and discussions with visitors, students, and other foreigners in Ecuador about the representation of Ecuadorians in guidebooks and tourism publicity. Person after person said, "I never even thought about it" or, "that never occurred to me," which is precisely why these representations are so insidious—they operate at a subliminal level and directly affect visitors' perceptions and expectations of Otavalo (and of Ecuador in general).

The foreign-local romances in Otavalo are almost all gringa-Otavaleño, rather than foreign males and Otavaleña (or white-mestiza) females. Frank Kiefer, hotel co-owner, said that in the 2 years his hotel has been open, at least 30 foreign women guests have tried to bring Otavaleños to their rooms for the night, but no male guests have tried to bring in Ecuadorian women (of any ethnic group). The hotel's policy is registered guests only, so the young men are turned away.

Young Ecuadorian females of all ethnicities are more sheltered and protected than young males for all the usual reasons, including their parents' fears of harm, pregnancy, and damage to their reputation. Indigenous women have much more freedom of movement than their mestiza-white counterparts, but the fear that their women will be raped is a genuine indigenous concern. The reason for this fear has its antecendents in the Spanish Conquest. Within recent memory, the *wasipungo* system made indigenous females vulnerable to mestizo-white abuse. While young Otavaleñas are traveling abroad as merchants in increasing numbers, they are often accompanied by, or going to meet, a male relative who functions as a chaperon and offers them protection and guidance. Some young Otavaleñas do travel abroad with another woman or completely alone, although this is less common.

Gringas in Otavalo are usually on their own and away from their families, boyfriends/husbands, and communities. For many, their trip to Ecuador is a liminal period, which gives them the feeling that their behavior in Otavalo does not really count because they will never return and no one at home will ever know about their activities. More than liminality is at work, however. Two young women from the United States who teach at a university in Chimborazo make the 14 hour round-trip bus ride every other weekend to be with Otavaleño lovers. Chimborazo province has Ecuador's highest concentration of indígenas, but they are also among the country's poorest, and there is no tourism scene like there is in Otavalo.

Otavalo is a friendly community in general. Indígenas invite people to their homes with an alacrity that is somewhat alarming to foreigners, who worry that indígenas might be taken advantage of. An American woman who admired a family's weavings in the market was promptly invited to their house. "Imagine meeting people in a mall and just inviting them home," she said. "I'd be afraid." Besides the market and the *artesanías* shops, a number of cafes and restaurants around the Poncho Plaza serve as meeting places for young people (Figures 6 and 7). Also the *peñas* function like their Euro-American counterparts, as places to hear music, hang out, and meet the opposite sex.

Another factor fostering gringa-Otavaleño affairs is cultural fit. Rhonda Bekker, a Peace Corps volunteer in Otavalo, recalled how a young Otavaleño came riding up beside her on his bicycle. He greeted her, asked how long she had been in Otavalo, then said he wanted a relationship with a gringa and a gringo baby. Rhonda demurred, but said she was surprised by his "suave" approach. At no time did she feel threatened. She contrasted this style with that of mestizo men who hiss at her or say "hey, baby," "mister," [sic] or "my love"—epitomes of

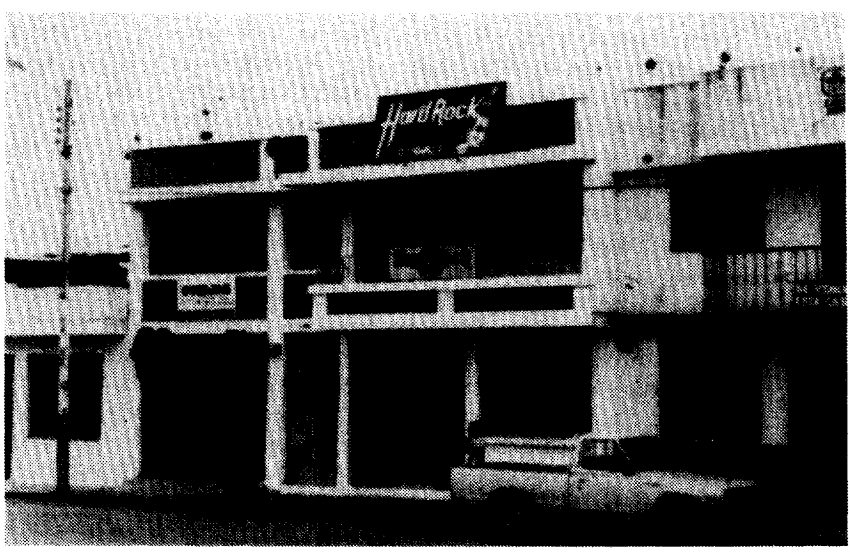

Figure 6. Places for Gringas and Otavaleños to Meet

Figure 7. Hangouts Around the Poncho Plaza

Latin *machismo*. Most gringas feel the hissing and comments to be offensive and dehumanizing. Worse than the remarks are the physical/sexual assaults of gringas by mestizos-whites in broad daylight on buses, in the Poncho Plaza, in the city hall, and on the street. The author also knows of several rape attempts by mestizos-whites of gringas. A gringa cannot be sure what will happen when she encounters mestizos-whites in public, especially if she is alone, whereas indigena males rarely behave in a threatening manner.

Rhonda said that young mestizos-whites often ask her why gringas prefer indígenas. The young men blamed indígenas' money and cars [an interesting reversal of the usual situation], but Rhonda tried to explain. One reason is how Otavaleños approach women. There is a closer cultural fit between the indigenas' approach and the way in which foreign women expect to be courted than with the approach of mestizos-whites. A second reason is the gringas' romantic attitude toward indígenas in general, which is difficult for mestizos-whites to understand. Because indígenas historically have been a disparaged and vilified population, many mestizos-whites cannot believe that a foreigner would prefer any indígena to themselves. Yet the vast majority of gringas are attracted to indígenas because of their search for an unspoiled, pre-industrial lifeway. The Otavalos' wealth creates further incentive and some Otavaleños are substantially richer than their visiting gringa girlfriends (a noble savage with a credit card and a Chevy Trooper is hard to beat), but the main attraction is the gringas' romantic approach to and interest in indigenous culture.

There is a fit between Euro-American and Otavalo culture in other areas, too. Indigenous women enjoy a high degree of social and economic equality. Land and other property is divided equally among all children; women keep their maiden names and property after mar-

riage; residence is neolocal; women own their own businesses and market kiosks; and both boys and girls are educated. Many tasks, including farming, storekeeping, market sales, and textile tasks are done by both genders. Childcare, hauling water, laundry, and cooking are considered female work, but it is not at all unusual to see boys helping out. Otavalos are pragmatic rather than dogmatic about division of labor and Otavaleños are not surprised or put off by independent women. An Otavaleña lawyer, Nina Pacari, is director of the committee on land, environment, and development for CONAIE, the national indigenous federation; and an Otavaleña, Carman Yamberla, was recently elected president of FICI, the Imbabura Federation of Indígenas and Campesinos (farmers). Gringas find Otavaleños far less offensively macho than most Ecuadorian males and much more likely to share tasks, including housework.

(Post)modern Romances

Many of the young women who come to Otavalo first meet Otavaleños outside Ecuador. If travel in Ecuador is a liminal period for gringas, then travel in Europe or the United States is a liminal period for Otavaleños. For many of them, living with a gringa is a survival strategy and much more enjoyable than sleeping in cheap hotels or living out of a car; it is also more economical, since the gringa pays the rent. If gringas are willing to take them home "right off the street," most Otavaleños are happy to oblige. "The majority [of Otavaleños in Europe] have lovers," admitted a young musician from Peguche (a community 2.4 miles north of Otavalo), who has traveled in Germany, Denmark, and Sweden.

Some Otavaleños consciously or unconsciously play on First World misconceptions and guilt, and some of their behavior is frankly exploitative: insincere declarations of love, failure to tell their lovers that they are married, making international phone calls without asking permission or offering to pay the bill, showing up for events without money or with extra friends, and borrowing with no intention of repaying the loan or returning the item, are but a few. Most Otavalos are married by age 25, many by age 20, so that the vast majority of musicians and merchants traveling abroad, male or female, are married. Europeans and Americans unfamiliar with the culture are not aware of this.

More than a dozen foreign women have complained to Peg Goodhart, hotel co-owner, that in their relationships with Otavaleños, they always end up paying for everything and that they feel used. The reasons vary as to why the Euro-American women permit this behavior. Some women are lonely and footing the bill is worth the company. Others feel guilty for being privileged First World citizens and/or want to be helpful to indígenas. Sometimes the relationship ends, sometimes the relationship continues but the exploitative behavior ends.

If two salient characteristics of postmodernity are radical disjunctures and increasing global contacts, then many of the Otavalos have leapt right into the postmodern world, skipping modernity in the process: from serfdom to Amsterdam in one generation. The stories of several gringa-Otavaleño encounters exemplify the issues and prob-

lems discussed above (the names of people have been changed, but true locations are given).

"Mary from Ohio," as Otavalos called her, met Jaime, an Otavaleño from Ilumán (a small town 4.5 miles north of Otavalo) in 1992. Jaime was 18 (about Mary's age) and playing music on the street in Costa Rica. Jaime has only a fourth-grade education. With his younger brother he supports their mother and younger sister through textile sales and infrequent remits of money from abroad. Without a husband/father the family has always struggled.

According to Mary, they fell in love in Costa Rica and planned to marry. She moved into Jaime's home, telling Jaime's mother and sister that she was his fiancée, while Jaime stayed on in Costa Rica. The family was taken aback, but took Mary in because such hospitality to a prospective daughter-in-law is customary. The cross-cultural living situation did not evolve smoothly, to put it mildly. Mary contributed no money or labor toward her room and board; disliked the food served and said so; wanted milk and eggs, both expensive luxuries in this household; and insisted on chicken regularly. She said, "we have machines for washing our clothes in my country" and objected to laundering by hand. When Jaime sent money, Mary said it was hers (and perhaps some was), distressing the family dependent on his help.

For 4 months, Jaime's mother and sister grew increasingly distraught. Mary's presence in the house was a heavy financial burden and she made them feel like servants. They could not evict their son's financée, and could not speak to Jaime as long as he was in Costa Rica. Before his travels began, Jaime had an Otavaleña girlfriend in Ilumán who, not surprisingly, was terribly jealous of Mary. She told Jaime's sister that she was going "to get a *pistola* (pistol) and kill her [Mary]," a statement straight out of the Mexican and Argentine *telenovelas* (soap operas) that are so popular on Ecuadorian TV. It was evident that Mary was not winning popularity contests in Ilumán.

Eventually Jaime phoned an aunt in the United States and learned his family's consternation. He said, "Mary's not my fiancée, she's just a girlfriend. I already have another gringita." Meanwhile, Mary visited the United States Embassy in Quito to get Jaime a visa to visit the States, but was told they had to be married. When she returned to Ilumán, Jaime's sister told her she could not stay with them anymore, but Mary's time in Ecuador was up anyway and she returned to Ohio.

In 1992 Jaime left for Europe to play music with his band. At first he was lonely and called Mary in Ohio with talk of getting married, but then he met a Dutch *chica* (girl) and Mary receded into the background. Indeed, judging from the postcards arriving in Ilumán, Jaime is the proverbial sailor with a girl in every port. The family was especially embarrassed by Mary's postcards, because the postmistress in Ilumán functions as a local version of *The National Enquirer* and town crier, and gossip travels fast in a small town. Mary visited Jaime over Christmas–New Year's 1993–94, but the young people stayed away from Jaime's relatives and agreed on a long engagement. The relationship may erode through distance and time. Jaime's family, beyond a doubt, awaits the day he settles down with a nice, hard-working Otavaleña.

Ginny, a 24-year-old from Arizona, with beautiful reddish-gold

hair, first encountered Otavaleños in 1986 when she was on a high school graduation trip to Europe. The Otavaleños playing music on the streets in Warsaw, Poland, and Paris, France were "hypnotic." Four or five years later, she became friends with an Otavalo band that was playing on the street in Arizona. She became a self-described "groupie," helping the group sell their cassettes and inviting them home to dinner. Eventually she took her savings and headed for Otavalo, "to marry an Indian."

Ginny wore traditional Otavalo women's costume, learned some Quichua, and hung out at the *peñas*, sometimes singing with a band from Saraguro (a community in southern Ecuador). She told everyone she was a virgin so that people would respect her. Otavalos are extremely reserved about public expression of heterosexual affection or touching beyond handshakes. Young Otavalos never walk down the street holding hands or with their arms around each other (though some men learned the habit abroad). When a gringa and Otavaleño walk hand-in-hand through the market; the man may look sheepish; but for the gringa, this public display says, "Look. I'm not just any old tourist. I have an indígena boyfriend."

Ginny engaged in highly inappropriate physical behavior: pinched, poked, and touched Otavaleños to the extent that one Otavaleña told her it was not respectable; invited indigenous men to her single apartment and into her bed, "not to have sex, just to cuddle," then complained that the men got "grabby"; said she loved "the sexual tension in Otavalo"; said she did not want to have sex with anyone "until I find someone worthy of me"; and complained about her landlord, who objected to men staying overnight. Ginny correctly observed that "Otavaleñas do not have male friends, they just have their brothers and cousins or their *novios* [fiancés]," but said, "all I want are male friends."

Rainbow, a hippie friend of Ginny's, who also wants to marry an Indian, was raped in Otavalo in 1993. She had been drinking with an Otavaleño who asked Rainbow if he could spend the night [a euphemism in most of the world for, "can we have sex?"]. Rainbow said yes, and invited him into the apartment where she staying alone, into her bedroom and into her bed, but then said, "No sex; I just want to cuddle." Her rape is reprehensible, but to the young indígena, Rainbow said "yes" when she allowed him to spend the night. What was she thinking of?

Ginny and Rainbow came to Ecuador to find a husband, a generic Indian (an excellent example of the Noble Savage trope at work) and held a highly romanticized view of indigenous culture. Yet, they behaved in a deeply confusing and offensive manner. Ginny caviled when the culture did not fit her fantasy or when her inappropriate behavior brought responses she did not like. In addition, because her money ran low, Ginny cadged meals from indigenous families and paid less for *artesanías* than she had agreed, resulting in the rupture of several friendships. When asked how many gringas she thought had short-term affairs with Otavaleños, Ginny said, "hundreds."

Students, as well as tourists, come to Otavalo and get involved with Otavaleños. So many students have spent their time involved sexually with Otavaleños instead of involved intellectually with their research

projects that expatriate Americans call this behavior the "Jennifer Syndrome" after one particularly notorious young woman. Generally, only the younger researchers who do not plan long-term connections with Otavalo engage in sexual affairs, because anyone familiar with the culture soon realizes that such affairs can severely damage their relations with the indigenous community. In general, the behavior of a few gringas causes problems for others who do not sleep around, because public opinion holds that "gringas are putas (sluts)."

Most parents do not approve of their young men sleeping around any more than they approve of gringas or their own young women behaving in this fashion. The young men, however, have more freedom of movement than young indigenous women for reasons mentioned previously. Some of them run their own or their family's stores in Quito or Otavalo, which usually have small living quarters attached, so it is much easier for Otavaleños to keep their affairs secret, especially if they pick up gringas in Otavalo and take them to Quito. Ironically, for gringas who think that an affair with an Otavaleño will bring them closer to the indigenous community, the effect is frequently the opposite: the young men do not want the gringas to meet their families or visit their towns.

Do any of these relationships result in marriages and are the marriages successful? Very few gringas who come to Otavalo looking for an indígena husband find one, usually because their behavior subjects them to censure. One young Dutch woman has lived in Peguche for 6 years, looking for a husband, but she is planning to return to the Netherlands. She engaged in several affairs and is considered disreputable. Sara, a pretty European woman in her early twenties of German-Spanish ancestry, met Pablo from Peguche when he was playing music on the streets of Madrid, Spain. Sara became wildly enamored of Pablo, initiated an affair and became pregnant. She arrived in Otavalo to live with Pablo in 1992 and in March 1993 a baby son was born. Pablo and Sara were later married. Sara's parents helped the couple financially, enabling them to build a house, furnish it and buy looms and a car. Sara wore traditional Otavaleña costume, sold in the market, helped her in-laws financially, and has a reputation as a good, hardworking young woman. But in 1993, Pablo took every cent of the couple's savings, abandoning Sara and the baby. He left for Argentina, telling Sara he did not know when he would return and not to expect him. Sara's parents again helped her out, this time with money for a lawyer to arrange her departure from Ecuador and a plane ticket for her and the baby to Spain. Her return to Otavalo is unlikely. In this case, Pablo probably would never have married Sara had she not shown up in Otavalo and forced the issue. For Pablo, she seems to have been just one more groupie, albeit a pretty one with financial resources. On the other hand, several European women have married Otavaleños from Cotama and Peguche and are living there, and the author knows of one Otavaleña who married a French man, and these marriages seem as happy as any. There are also a number of Otavaleños who have married women in Europe, Japan, and North America and who are living abroad.

With all the sexual activity at home and abroad, the possibility of

the transmission of AIDS poses a serious threat, that seems to be ignored by Otavaleños and gringas alike. Otavaleños, if they know anything about AIDS at all, consider it a disease of homosexuals. They do not realize that if the previous partner of their foreign girlfriend was an intravenous drug user, bisexual, hemophiliac, or the recipient of contaminated blood, then that partner could have infected his girlfriend who could infect the Otavaleño, who could infect his wife. So far there are no known cases of AIDS among Otavalos, but there is little or no HIV testing being done, and virtually no AIDS education. Chances are good that there are already HIV-positive Otavalos. A smarmy Ecuadorian rhyme that appears in various forms as a decal on buses expresses the local attitudes toward AIDS: "Mejor una chola conocida, que una gringa con SIDA" (Better a local girl who is known, than a gringa with AIDS). This makes HIV into a joke that is someone else's problem.

Many gringas, who should know better, seem to be ignoring the risk. One reason might have to do with the myth of timelessness that pervades so much thinking about Otavalo. If the inhabitants of the indígenous "villages" are living in a pre-industrial utopia, then by this reasoning they are also living in the pre-AIDS past. Another reason for the relative unconcern about AIDS is the complete lack of alarm about AIDS and the lack of AIDS education in Otavalo (and in Ecuador in general). Everyone seems to be in denial.

CONCLUSIONS

Otavalo exemplifies a number of the contradictory trends of contemporary tourism and travel. The visited are now visiting others and women as well as men are sexual aggressors, considering an affair to be an added bonus on a vacation, business, or research trip abroad. The Otavalo example also points to a pattern of certain young, budget travelers of whatever gender and ethnicity prolonging their sojourns abroad by exploiting the local population. Power is not invariably weighted on the side of a particular gender or ethnicity. Indígenas have the power to end financially draining relationships, and some do: Mary was sent away; Ginny is unwelcome in many homes. Gringas also can end exploitative situations and some do: insisting on an equitable sharing of expenses, ending the romantic relationship, or like Sara, leaving her Otavaleño husband.

Otavalo is both unique and representative of indigenous communities in Latin America. It is unique in its wealth and in the large number of Otavalos who are able to journey abroad. It is typical in the way in which indigenous culture and indigenous men are romanticized by Europeans and Americans, especially women, who buy the utopian picture painted by the tourism industry, New Age ideology, and ecology movement, and who seek in indigenous culture and indigenous males a nobler, pre-industrial past. But rather than exemplifying a classic example of First World exploitation, the sexual affairs between gringas and Otavaleños represent rather sad cases of two groups of people fascinated by, and using, one another. The Otavaleños, whose culture does not condone the sexual and economic exploitation of

young women, all too quickly learn this habit. Long-term observers in Otavalo see the pattern, but each young gringa arrival finds the situation unique. Unfortunately, instead of bringing gringas closer to the indigenous community, these sexual affairs frequently isolate them from it.□□

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